



## Safe use of cleaning chemicals in the hospitality industry

### Catering Information Sheet No 22

#### Introduction

Many different types of hazardous cleaning chemicals are used in the hospitality industry. They include washing-up liquids, dishwasher detergents and rinse-aids, drain-cleaning products, oven cleaners, disinfectants, toilet cleaners, bleach, sanitisers and descalers.

This information sheet will be relevant to you if you or your staff use any hazardous cleaning chemicals. By following the guidance you can reduce the risk of accidental injury or ill health at work.

Contamination of food is not covered in this information sheet. For detailed guidance on food safety requirements contact your local Environmental Health Officer.

#### What are the health risks?

The most common risks are likely to be through contact with the skin or eyes, breathing in or swallowing.

Many cleaning chemicals are hazardous because they are corrosive and can cause skin and eye burns if splashed onto the body. Without proper controls, some may cause dermatitis (dry, sore, flaky skin) or other skin irritations, asthma and breathing problems.

It is highly unlikely that any adult would ever think of drinking a cleaning chemical intentionally but it is still common to find food or drink containers being used to store hazardous cleaning substances.

Touching the face/eyes/skin after handling a cleaning chemical can cause irritation, inflammation or chemical burns.

Some substances can cause breathing problems if oversprayed, used without adequate ventilation or sprayed onto hot surfaces, for example oven cleaner.

There can also be adverse chemical reactions when substances are mixed, for example cleaning products containing bleach mixed with acidic toilet cleaners or ammonia will give off harmful gases.

Other risks arise from accidental splashes to the skin and eyes while cleaning chemicals are being poured from one container into another or from spillages while

being carried in open containers. There may also be manual handling risks if the containers are heavy or bulky. (See 'Further reading' for details of a free catering information sheet on manual handling risks.)

The following case studies illustrate common types of accidents and control measures that can be taken to avoid them.

#### Case study 1

**Premises: Fast-food takeaway**

**Cleaning chemical: Bleach (sodium hypochlorite)**

An employee poured bleach into an empty spray bottle. A reaction occurred with unknown remains in the bottle, causing the bleach to spurt out of the bottle into the eyes of another employee.

#### Control measures

Train staff on use and handling of cleaning chemicals, including instructions not to mix different chemicals and ensure that all containers and spray bottles are clearly labelled with their contents. Provide information on first-aid procedures and what to do in the event of accidental spillages. Provide protective gloves for use when handling.

#### Case study 2

**Premises: Fast-food takeaway**

**Cleaning chemical: Caustic pan/oven degreaser**

Twenty minutes after cleaning a deep fat fryer using spray caustic pan/oven cleaner, the employee experienced reddening to the face and neck. The company had a written procedure that had been followed; this included wearing a face visor.

There had been no direct skin contact with the degreaser and the cause of injury was assumed to be either aerosol spray from the cleaner or cross-contamination from gauntlets worn at the time. Other employees had also reported tingling sensations when using this chemical.

#### Control measures

Stop using the existing degreaser and ask the supplier for a safer alternative. Monitor use closely and ask staff to alert you immediately if they suffer any side effects.

### Case study 3

**Premises:** Hotel

**Cleaning chemical:** Oven cleaner

An employee was working near the grill, which was being cleaned by the sous chef using caustic oven cleaner. Later that night, she became wheezy and suffered an asthma attack. The following day she consulted her GP suffering from a blister at the back of her throat and burns to her nasal passage.

Investigation of this accident revealed that the oven cleaner had been sprayed onto a hot surface, against supplier's recommendations that it should only be used on warm surfaces. The high temperature caused the oven cleaner to boil, producing a harmful vapour (sodium hydroxide) that had drifted.

Enquiries also revealed that COSHH training had not been given to employees and that the sous chef did not use any personal protective equipment while cleaning.

#### Control measures

Train staff on the use and handling of cleaning chemicals, including instruction that hot surfaces should be allowed to cool sufficiently before applying oven cleaner. This would prevent producing harmful fumes.

There should be adequate ventilation while the cleaning is underway. Personal protective clothing should be provided when using the substance, eg appropriate gloves, face visor, fume mask, apron, as per manufacturer's recommendations.

#### Legal requirements

Legal requirements applying to the use of cleaning chemicals include the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and, more specifically, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH). These require employers to:

- **assess** the risks that arise from the use of hazardous substances. This will include any arrangements to deal with accidents, incidents or emergencies, such as those resulting from serious spillages. The assessment must also include the health and safety risks arising from storage, handling or disposal of any of the substances;
- **prevent**, or if this is not reasonably practicable, **control** the exposure to such substances;
- provide staff with **information, instruction and training** on the risks and the steps and precautions the employer has taken to control these risks, for example provision of appropriate rubber gloves or appropriate eye protection.

See 'Further reading' for sources of guidance on COSHH.

#### Employers' practical risk assessment

**Step 1:** List all the hazardous chemicals used.

**Step 2:** Consider whether there is a need to use each substance in the first place. Stop using those that are not required.

**Step 3:** For each of those substances remaining and for any new cleaning chemicals you later consider, ask your supplier if this is the safest product available or is there a safer alternative, which you should use if it is available. Ask your supplier if you can purchase diluted products in smaller containers that will be easier to use.

**Step 4:** For all chemicals used, record a description of their use, eg oven cleaner, and a description of the type of hazard they represent, eg irritant/corrosive/toxic etc (this will be found in the product safety data sheets or product labels). It will include instructions on first-aid measures and advice on what to do in case of accidental spillages. If you do not have this information ask your supplier to provide it. Manufacturers and suppliers of hazardous substances are required by law to provide safety information on their products.

**Step 5:** Consider where and how the chemicals are used or handled. Avoid pouring from and using bulk containers, as these can be heavy and hard to hold. Minimise handling, eg by use of appropriate syphons, pumps etc, use smaller containers, and avoid carrying open containers, especially if floors are wet or slippery.

**Step 6:** Try to keep chemicals in their original containers and, if decanting, ensure that containers are clearly marked and labelled with the manufacturer's instructions for use. The label should clearly identify the hazards of the substance. This will help to prevent any confusion regarding the contents.

**Step 7:** Consider the safe storage arrangements - away from heat, sunlight, foodstuffs and members of public, especially children. Containers should all have lids and be clearly labelled. Cleaning and disinfecting chemicals should be securely stored. Always check manufacturers' storage instructions, as some products may need to be stored separately from others.

**Step 8:** Ensure all your employees are informed, trained, and supervised in the use of cleaning chemicals. It will not be enough just to issue safety data sheets; you must ensure that your employees understand the hazards and the measures needed to control any risks.

**Step 9:** Take into consideration any of your staff who do not have English as a first language. You must

ensure that they clearly understand. Posters or graphics can help as reminders on carrying out the job safely.

Remember employees and their safety representatives should be consulted about health and safety issues including the use of cleaning chemicals. They may have experienced problems or come up with solutions that you may not have considered.

**Step 10:** Monitor and review employees' use of cleaning chemicals. Supervisors should observe that they are being used and stored correctly. Ensure new employees are trained.

**Step 11:** Make sure appropriate protective clothing is available when using the cleaning chemical. This could include eye protection, various types of gloves, facemasks and visors etc. Latex gloves are known to cause reactions and should be avoided. Employees must be trained when and how to use and replace such protection.

**Step 12:** Check first-aid arrangements. Staff should be trained in first-aid actions to take in the event of accidental contact with skin or eyes, and appropriate first-aid provision should be available, eg eyewash bottles. Safety data sheets should be kept in a place known to staff in the event that they need to be referred to in case of spillage or an accident.

### Employees' guidance

- Always follow carefully any instructions and training information given in the use of cleaning chemicals.
- Remember that your safety representative and you as an employee are entitled to be consulted by your employer about health and safety issues including the use of cleaning chemicals.
- When handling substances, especially concentrates (if unavoidable), always wear the protective clothing provided, eg rubber gloves. If there is any danger of splashing, wear eye protection suitable for splash risks, eg goggles or visors, and ensure an eyewash bottle is available. If cleaning at eye level or above, wear eye protection.
- Check that rubber gloves are free from holes, tears or thin patches. If any of these faults are present ask for replacements immediately. Tell your employer if you experience any irritation or allergy from gloves you have used.
- Never mix cleaning chemicals.
- When diluting always add the concentrated liquid to water, not the water to the concentrate.
- If cleaning chemicals are accidentally splashed onto your skin or eyes, always wash away with plenty of water. Seek medical advice if irritation persists and tell your employer.

- Avoid lifting and pouring from heavy or awkward bulk containers, minimise handling by use of syphons, pumps etc.
- If you are dispensing powders, always use a scoop; never use your hand.
- Never transfer cleaning chemicals into food or drink containers where they can easily be mistaken for foodstuffs. Ensure spray bottles are other containers are clearly marked with their contents.
- If aerosols are used for cleaning, never spray onto hot surfaces as this can produce harmful vapours. Never place aerosols on hot surfaces.
- Only use cleaning chemicals in well-ventilated areas. Sometimes an open window will be enough, but proper extract ventilation should be installed if fumes are a risk. A suitable fume mask and goggles may also be required depending on manufacturer's instructions.
- Always clean up any spills on floors or work surfaces immediately.
- Always store chemicals as manufacturers advise, for example away from heat, sunlight, foodstuffs and members of the public, especially children.
- Ensure chemicals are disposed of properly, as instructed by your employer following the information given in the safety data sheet.
- Let your supervisor or manager know immediately if you experience any adverse reactions to substances, for example headaches, nausea, skin complaints.

### Further reading

*Control of substances hazardous to health. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L5* (Fourth edition) HSE Books 2002 ISBN 0 7176 2534 6

*COSHH: A brief guide to the Regulations. What you need to know about the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)* Leaflet INDG136(rev2) HSE Books 2003 (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 2677 6)

*COSHH essentials: Easy steps to control chemicals. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations* HSG193 HSE Books 1999 ISBN 0 7176 2421 8  
Also available online: [www.coshh-essentials.org.uk](http://www.coshh-essentials.org.uk).

*Occupational dermatitis in the catering and food industries* Food Information Sheet FIS17 HSE Books 1997

*Manual handling in the catering industry* Catering Information Sheet CAIS13 HSE Books 2000

More catering information sheets are also available from HSE Books and on the HSE website – please see address etc in 'Further information'.

## Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk) (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 08701 545500 Fax: 02920 859260 e-mail: [hseinformationservices@natbrit.com](mailto:hseinformationservices@natbrit.com) or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

<p>This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.</p>
---

© *Crown copyright* This publication may be freely reproduced, except for advertising, endorsement or commercial purposes. First published 10 /03. Please acknowledge the source as HSE.